

DEFINITIONS OF “REGIONAL” AND “STATEWIDE” AS TERMS USED IN THE 1984 AMENDMENT TO THE URBAN SELF-HELP ACT

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The Urban Self-Help Law has provided cost-sharing for acquisition of outdoor recreation lands by cities of any size, and for towns exceeding 35,000 in population. The 1984 amendment broadened allowable projects to include development, as well as acquisition. Further, it extended eligibility to towns with lesser population sizes provided the proposed projects would be of regional or statewide usage. It is toward the definition and characterization of these latter two terms, in context of these smaller towns, that this study is directed.

It would be optimal, if outdoor recreation opportunities were available equally to all citizens of the State. Unfortunately, however, the distribution is uneven, with the available open spaces being more commonly away from the dense areas. Much progress has been made and the 1984 amendment provides an opportunity to gain even more progress toward this goal.

In order to approach the task of defining the terms “regional” and “statewide” usage in such ways as to be of help to the Division of Conservation Services as it attempts to sort out the various proposals from towns. More specifically, the lower and upper limits of these two levels must be distinguished. It is clear that the legislative intent was not to accommodate single towns providing merely for their own residents. It is further, assumed that it was not the legislative intent to expect individual towns to substitute for the state park system by providing for all of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

The usual definition in the park and recreation literature pertains to a larger scale than prevails in Massachusetts. In most states incorporated areas are scattered and surrounded by unincorporated areas served by county government. “Regional” trends to equate with “county” or with “special taxing district (or authority).” The latter commonly consist of a unique area for some unincorporated fringe areas. Since Massachusetts has no unincorporated land, county government is of minor importance and provides almost no outdoor recreation. In any case, county governments are not eligible to apply under this act. A useful definition for Massachusetts must be found in other ways than by reliance on literature.

Dr. Rutherford Platt¹ has recently summarized aptly the concept and usage of “region:”

Regionalism is the Holy Grail of American land use planning and resource management. Since at least the late nineteenth century, progressive thinkers and reformers have advocated “regionalism as a response to the inequities and diseconomies of the American urban system.

¹ Platt, Rutherford, n.d. *Metropolitan Regionalism: Implications for Flood Loss Reductions*. Working Paper No. 11, p 1. Land & Water Policy Center, Dept. of Geology and Geography. University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.

The term “regionalism”, however, lacks any accepted definition. Geographically, it may encompass areas ranging in size from slightly more than a single municipality to groups of states designated for administrative or statistical purposes by the federal government. Kruecheberg² cites a common adage among planners:

“Q” : What is the region?

“A” : The region is the next level above the one on which we have been working but cannot find a solution.

Regionalism is also vague as a term of art. Lewis Mumford and Benton MacKaye have advocate regionalism as a normative concept, a “better” approach to the ordering of settlements than to leave all planning decisions to the private owner and local municipality. In another sense, regionalism is a pragmatic term, denoting the provision of governmental services at some level of government, which encompass a broad geographic area. In such cases the breadth of the geographic area presumably relates to the type of function involved.

As a result of such considerations and in recognition of the small size of the Commonwealth, one eventually arrives at the conclusion that arbitrary definitions are necessary, based on best judgment.

The goal of the law, by title, is to serve urban populations, and, by amendment, to serve populations less than urban, but greater than that of a small (under 35,000 population) town. The dual nature of the goal leads to a duality of criteria.

First, it is proposed that any such small town proposing an outdoor recreation development intended to serve one or more nearby urban areas or population centers in addition to its own residents be considered eligible if the total population to be served exceeds 35,000 and if the proposal meets other criteria.

Secondly, it is proposed that radial limits be recognized for distinguishing among the projected populations to be served.

Because of the small size of Massachusetts, hardly any town is more than 25 miles from a state border or a population center. Therefore, it is proposed that a radius of 25 miles be adopted as the cutting edge between regional and statewide population areas. This is half the distance between the New Hampshire-Vermont state line and the Connecticut-Rhode Island state line. It is also half the distance between Boston and Lowell, Worcester or Fall River.

In turn, any project, which can reasonably be expected to serve a population drawn from farther than 25 miles, may be considered of statewide significance. Since state and federal agencies and others provide outdoor recreation opportunities for the citizens of the entire state and more, it is assumed that the legislature may not really intend to restrict “statewide” to a literal definition, rather to something greater than “regional”.

It is proposed, therefore, to consider the “statewide” criterion met if the proposed outdoor recreation development will serve a population within a one-hour drive. One hour of driving will take one from Vermont or New Hampshire to Connecticut or Rhode Island and two and one-half hours of driving will reach from Boston to the New York state line.

In summary, it is proposed that:

1. Projects to serve only the residents of a town under 35,000 population be considered of town-wide significance and ineligible;
2. Projects to serve a regional population of 35,000 which resides within a radius of 25 miles be considered of regional significance and eligible; and
3. Projects to serve one or more urban areas and/or the residents living within a one-hour driving radius be considered of statewide significance and eligible; provided other appropriate criteria are met.

² Kruecheberg, D.A. (ed.) 1983. Introduction to Planning History of the United States, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research.

In addition to the criterion of size of population to be served, other factors to be addressed here pertain to accessibility, size, site features and development proposed.

In both regional and statewide projects, all age groups should be served. Barriers to the handicapped should also be overcome.

Access by automobile should be available in the form of roads of reasonable capacity and quality. Where appropriate, accessibility by public transportation and/or other means, such as boats, bicycles, or walking should be provided.

An important feature, where private transportation is used, is adequacy of parking accommodations. The regional facilities should provide ample parking for at least 100 cars at one time, and statewide areas, 200 or more cars.

In addition to vehicular access, such areas need to provide adequate comfort stations and outlets for potable water, consistent with the standards and ratios contained in the State Sanitary Code, and with design capacity to match the expected peak populations of users as indicated by the public transportation and parking accommodations.

As to size of areas, the standards of the National Recreation and Park Association specify that a regional park, as here defined, should have an area five to ten acres per thousand residents of the area served, while a statewide facility, as here defined, should approximate 20 acres per thousand. These are not figures to be followed slavishly since they represent a national perspective, and generally refer to comprehensive parks, but they do give some indication of the concept that the statewide areas are expected to provide for more dispersed forms of outdoor recreation.

In general, the areas of less than 100 acres are likely to be of more value in the regional context, while statewide areas may exceed this figure.

The general expectation is that regional areas will provide relatively close to home opportunities for a day's outing to participate in activities not adequately available near home. Picnicking, walking, canoeing, boating, bicycling, fishing, play areas, simple nature study, day camping, golf courses, and beaches are typical activities and features which may be considered at a regional facility.

At a statewide area any of the above may be found, but at a greater scale. In addition, one might expect such more dispersed activities as hiking, bridle and snowmobile trail systems, overnight tenting and group camping areas, large-group picnic sites, minitrains, children's zoos, botanic gardens, nature centers with programs, scenic drives, and skiing hill facilities.

In both cases scenic and historic resources are desirable. A diversity of terrain, streams, hills and valleys, lakes and ponds, uplands and marshes, woods and fields will add attractiveness to such areas. A statewide facility is most apt to incorporate or adjoin a unique uncommon resource or cultural significance.

Concessions for sale of food and beverages, film and the like and the rental of boats and other equipment may be necessary to enhance usage.

In summation, a regional facility consists of an area designed to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for a large population within a twenty-five mile radius when such population is not already being adequately served by facilities more conveniently located to them and which have adequate capacity. It may be provided by a single town or by a special recreation district consisting of two or more towns. It need not offer a broad array of activities, but ones consistent with the characteristics of the site and with the intent of augmenting opportunities available elsewhere, as described above. It must do so with a design capacity for 100 automobiles and their occupants.

A statewide facility may do any of the above in serving a larger area and its population as well as providing for more dispersed activities for which groups, families, and individuals will travel up to an hour because such opportunities for forms of outdoor recreation which are available closer to home but are not of sufficient capacity or are otherwise inaccessible (i.e. barriers to the handicapped).

Alternately, they may complement or enhance activities of other entities, such as national or state agencies. For example, provision of warming huts or trail networks, which tie in with existing areas to make them more accessible or more attractively usable, may be considered adequate justification for inclusion in eligibility. Another favored type of proposal would be that of providing access to unique natural, cultural, or park and recreation resources not otherwise conveniently reachable.

Finally, it seems important to specify that grants should be for construction, development, or renovation (as well as acquisition of land or existing outdoor recreation facilities), but not for maintenance, and that any such grants should be made only when in receipt of commitments for adequate operation and maintenance within the foreseeable future.

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